The Inner Fire: How Azula Got Ty-lee Spanked
By Captain Falcon Punch and Yu May

[Content warning: this story depicts corporal punishment. This story is not an endorsement of the actions depicted.]

The shattered fragments of the antique vase, commissioned by Fire Lord Sozin himself, lay on the floor before Princess Azula.

Unlike other children, Azua didn't panic when she broke something. She approached it like she would a game of Pai-Sho, or a battle. She took a moment to form her strategy then implemented it without hesitation.

The first thing to remember when trying to hide something you did wrong: never, ever admit that you're the one at fault.

You'll never be able to come up with a plan if you secretly feel like you deserve to be caught.

No, the fact that the vase broke must have been someone else's fault, thought Azula, now whose was it?

One of the servants? They should have been watching her more carefully. They should certainly be punished for being so inattentive. Azula thought for a moment of one of the young female servants, Isuzu by name, who had been keeping an eye on her lately. Azula could usually get away with anything, but the servant girl had already run to tattle to Ursa once. Azula would love to see her punished for this.

But no, that servant girl was too smart. She'd probably have an alibi.

The only one it could possibly be to blame for the broken vase was Ty Lee. After all, she was always doing cartwheels around the house. She could have easily broken anything if she'd slipped up just once.

Plus, Ty Lee had been teaching Azula how to do advanced gymnastics. If Azula had gone off on her own to practice her back flips in a room full of delicate vases, it was only because she had the admirable quality of ambition: she had to surpass Ty Lee.

One thing was clear, if it hadn't been for Ty Lee, this vase would have stayed unbroken.

All that was needed was to convince Ty Lee that this really was her fault.

In a matter of seconds, Azula reassembled the larger pieces of the vase and used firebending to mold them together roughly. Hardly quality work, but enough to fool Ty Lee.

Then, Azula went to find the guilty party. Snatching Ty Lee out of the garden, Azula dragged her to the vase room, and pleaded with her to teach her more acrobatics.

Even Ty Lee was hesitant to do cartwheels in a room crowded with delicate art, but Azula was persuasive. “It’s not wrong Ty Lee. After all, you’re so good, you’re always in control. I bet you could walk around this room on your hands and be less likely to break something than me.”

Ty Lee giggled, and finally caved to pressure. The problem with Azula’s plan was that she wasn’t just flattering her friend. Ty Lee was so skilled, minutes passed by as she showed Azula gymnastic stunts, yet she hadn’t gotten anywhere near breaking anything.

Finally, Azula decided she would have to hurry things along. After convincing Ty Lee to show her several backflips in a row, Azula waited until Ty Lee was one flip away from the already-broken vase and…

“WOW, TY LEE! THAT IS SO AWESOME!!!!” Azula shrieked.

It worked.

Ty Lee was distracted at just the wrong moment. The hastily repaired vase tumbled and cracked to pieces again, and Ty Lee gasped when she saw what she had done.

“Oh, Zula, what am I gonna do?” she squeaked.

“Maybe if we just leave, there will be none the wiser that—”

Azula was interrupted by a familiar voice. “What’s going on up here? Oh, I knew all along!”

As planned, Azula’s scream had not gone unnoticed. That obnoxious servant girl, Isuzu, had shown up. Azula smirked, not even bothering to pretend to look innocent.

The servant girl shot a cold stare at Azula. “This time, you’ve gone too far, young mistress. You’ve been expressly told not to horse around up here many times, but when your mother finds out about this…”

Azula found herself wishing she *had* thought of a way to pin this on the servant. That bossy voice was beginning to annoy her.

“Excuse me, ma’am, Azula didn’t break anything?” Ty Lee piped in, fighting to keep her voice steady.

Isuzu whirled on Ty Lee, and sized her up. Isuzui had seen Azula’s little playmate before, but had never actually spoken to her. Ty Lee didn’t seem as arrogant as Azula, but Isuzu decided any friend of Azula’s was trouble.

Without hesitation, Isuzu marched over to Ty Lee and pinned her under one arm. “Well, aren’t you that little acrobat? Didn’t your parents teach you not to go pulling those sorts of stunts indoors?”

With that, Isuzu delivered two sharp smacks to Ty Lee’s bottom.

Azula scowled. “Hey, who said you could spank my friend?”

Azula didn’t necessarily feel bad for her friend, she was more upset that Isuzu was overstepping her authority.

Isuzu had threatened to spank Azula in the past. Azula had dared her to try. It had been quite a battle of wills and wits between the two. Azula guessed that this spanking was just a show meant to intimidate her.

Her guess pretty much hit the mark. Isuzu, already frustrated by the prospect of cleaning this up, and paying for it out of her wages, decided this would be a good opportunity to show Azula what she was capable of.

Isuzu had never spanked Azula. After all, Azula’s parents had not explicitly given her that authority. However, they had also never told Isuzu that she was *not* allowed to spank Azula. If she ever did, Isuzu knew that she had better have a heck of a case, or Azula would stop at nothing to have her thrown out.

Isuzu had hoped the mere threat of a spanking would encourage Azula to behave like a decent human being, but the girl was incorrigible. Perhaps a little demonstration with Ty Lee would convince Azula not to cross Isuzu’s path.

Speaking to Ty Lee, but looking right at Azula, Isuzu announced, “Proper girls do not jump around indoors. That’s the way a winged-lemur behaves. In fact, I have a pet like that, and do you know what I do if it breaks something by fooling around indoors, missy?”

“Wh-what?” asked Ty Lee, dreading the answer.

“Why, I pick it up by its tail and smack its rump to teach it better.”

Foolishly, Ty Lee giggled. “Well, you can’t do that to me. I don’t have a tail!”

“Oh?” said Isuzu, sweetly, playing with Ty Lee’s long braided ponytail. Then she seized the end of it and yanked it high. Ty Lee cried as she felt her whole body pulled up by the hair. Isuzu could not lift her into the air, but she could keep her dancing on tip-toe.

Isuzu's lecturing was lost amid the sound of her hand smacking Ty Lee's backside and Ty Lee's crying. When Isuzu released Ty Lee's hair, the girl clutched her bottom, relieved that it was over so quickly, only to realize that Isuzu was still lecturing her. "If I ever catch you skipping through the air around here, indoors or out, I'll pick you up off the ground, like a baby monkey, and spank you like one."

With that, Isuzu pinned Ty Lee around the waist with one arm again, but this time lifted her up and held her pinned under her arm as she spanked hard with her free hand.

Amid the sounds of Iszuu's lecturing, Azula's roars, and Ty Lee's cries, boomed another female voice. "Isuzu, stop that at once!"

It was Lady Ursa, Azula's mother.

It took an effort for Azula to hide any sign of her nerves. Ty Lee, and Isuzu audibly gulped.

…

After marching to Lady Ursa's private washitu, all three girls knelt on their knees in the seiza position to await the Lady's arrival. Ty Lee and Isuzu flinched as they heard the sliding door shut behind them, followed by Lady Ursa's footsteps, before she knelt on the tatami map to face all three of them. Lady Ursa fixed Azula with a stern look, but Azula didn't blink.

Outside, the bamboo water fountain clapped a gentle rhythm.

Lady Ursa made eye contact with Isuzu and Ty Lee each in turn, before she sighed and spoke formally. "All right, I know a rare, Sozin-Era vase was smashed, and I know that Isuzu gave Ty Lee a spanking for it. Ty Lee, Azula, I promise to give you both a fair hearing soon enough, but first I want to speak to Isuzu without interruption. Is that all right, Ty Lee?"

Ty Lee shuffled uncomfortably as she felt the soft sting from her backside flare up, then beamed as Ursa addressed her kindly. "Yes, ma'am! I'll shut up!"

Ursa smiled. She could only hope that some of Ty Lee's attitude would rub off on Azula sooner or later. "Thank you, Ty Lee. Now, Isuzu, before we discuss the matter of the vase, I want to discuss the matter of the spanking itself. Has Prince Ozai ever given you permission to spank Azula?"

Isuzu gripped the hem of her servant's kimono. "No, my Lady. But I have permission to spank the younger kamuro servant girls, if they act out of line. And breaking a vase would certainly merit–"

"Ty Lee is not a servant. She is a guest at this household. Has Prince Ozai ever given you permission to spank one of Azula's friends?"

Isuzu felt dizzy. If she lost this position, the loss of income would devastate her family, to say nothing of the shame it would bring on her. “No, my Lady.”

“Did anyone else in this house tell you that you had permission to spank either Azula or her friends?”

“Every…every other noble house I’ve worked for allowed me to punish–”

“This is not any other noble house, Isuzu. You are in the house of Prince Ozai.”

Although Lady Ursa didn’t raise her voice, Isuzu immediately sensed danger. Bowing low, Isuzu pressed her forehead against the tatami mat below her, near tears. “Forgive me, my Lady! Please, have me flogged! But don’t send me away!”

Exasperated, Lady Ursa pressed her brow, then barked like a soldier, “Enough of that groveling! I can’t talk to you while you’re bobbing your head up and down like a turtle-duck. Now, hold your head high, and look me in the eye.”

“Yes, m-my Lady!” Isuzu obeyed, and sat up stiffly, not even daring to wipe away the tears glistening on her cheeks,

Azula stilled her hand from trembling with excitement. This was more than she could have hoped for. Maybe she’d get to see Isuzu whipped after all.

Ty Lee fidgeted, not quite sure what was happening, nor how she felt about it. She knew that Lady Ursa could be quite scary when she needed to be, usually when Azula was getting them into trouble. But Ty Lee had never seen Lady Ursa bark at anyone else with the “angry mom” voice, not even the servants. Part of Ty Lee felt sorry for Isuzu, but another part of Ty Lee was still stinging from a recent spanking. *That* part of her didn’t feel so sorry for Isuzu, Ty Lee decided.

Ursa waited until Isuzu had settled herself back into her seated position on her knees. “That’s better. Now, Isuzu, I’m not going to have you flogged, so please calm yourself, listen carefully, and think carefully before you answer. I asked you if *anyone* in this house ever told you that you had permission to spank one of Prince Ozai’s children, or the children of any of his guests.”

Isuzu’s voice still trembled, but she held herself high. With a sniff, she banished her tears. “No, my Lady. No one has ever explicitly told me I could spank one of the children, apart from the young servants.”

Azula puffed up her chest. “*I* certainly told her she didn’t have father’s permission to spank us, but she didn’t listen.”

Ursa's eyes flashed. "I was not speaking to you, Azula. Hold your tongue, and let Isuzu speak for herself."

Azula's ears twitched, but she answered with the appearance of politeness. "Yes, Mother. Forgive me, my Lady."

Azula pressed her lips together tightly.

Ursa nodded, before turning her attention back to Isuzu. "You are forgiven, Azula. Now, Isuzu, you say no one has ever *explicitly* given you permission. Has anyone ever *implied* that you may spank Prince Zuko, Princess Azula, or any of their playmates?"

Isuzu exhaled. "Well, when you interviewed me, Prince Ozai said…he said I was responsible for Azula, and responsible for any damage done by anyone during my working hours, and that I was expected to *bring her in line*."

Impressed, Ursa nodded. "Yes, his exact words. You have an excellent memory, Isuzu. So, I suppose you took that to mean that you indeed had such permission?"

Isuzu's face lit up. She felt like she could see a light at the end of a dark tunnel. "That's correct, my Lady! It was the way Prince Ozai said it. I supposed that–"

"Then you supposed *incorrectly*, Isuzu. You do not have permission to spank Prince Zuko, nor Princess Azula, nor any of their friends. Is that clear?"

Isuzu hid all traces of her inner despair as she answered, "Yes, ma'am." Isuzu's only solace was that Ursa had at least promised not to have her whipped. She guessed that Lady Ursa would probably have her privately caned, then quietly dismissed, sparing her public shame. At the moment, Isuzu thought even that was more mercy than she deserved. All Isuzu could hope for was to be given a neutral letter of recommendation, so that she could still seek employment elsewhere.

Oblivious to Isuzu's dilemma, Ty Lee raised her hand, bouncing up and down on her seat. "Excuse me, Lady Ursa, may I ask a question?"

Ursa hid her laughter behind a soft smile. "You already have asked a question, Ty Lee."

Ty Lee's mouth hung open as she realized she'd shown improper manners. "Ooh! Sorry, I spoke out of turn. Um…forgive me, my Lady!" Ty Lee kowtowed, pressing her head to the tatami, before remembering Lady Ursa didn't like that.

Ursa was patient with Ty Lee, but she also didn't want Ty Lee to ever make the same mistake in front of Prince Ozai. "I forgive you, Ty Lee. But remember to be careful about your manners if you're ever invited to sit at court, especially in the royal presence. Did you know a Fire Nation

general was once sentenced to life imprisonment at the Boiling Rock for speaking out of turn before Fire Lord Azulon?"

Ty Lee's eyes widened. "No, Ma'am. I didn't know that."

Ursa smiled gently. "Then, please don't forget it, Ty Lee. You may ask another question, if you wish."

"Well, it's just that, at my home, I get spanked for breaking things all the time. I'm sure my parents won't mind that Isuzu spanked me. They'd probably say she did a good job!"

Azula sneered. "Did they ever dangle you by the hair while spanking you?"

"Azula, not one more word," Ursa snapped.

Mechanically, precisely, Azula lowered her head to the tatami mat, hiding her smile. She knew her mother hated it when servants did that, but it was technically the correct form of apology. "Yes, Mother. Forgive my stupidity, my Lady."

Exasperated, Ursa waved a hand. She hated having to enforce the formalistic rules of the Fire Nation court, and she suspected Azula's apology was only performative, but she also didn't have time to challenge her daughter to a contest of wills. "No need for that! You are forgiven, Azula."

Pleased with her success, Azula snapped back into her seated position.

Isuzu quailed. She felt like she was sitting in a boiling pot, and Azula was slowly raising the fire below her.

Azula's hatred for Isuzu was no secret to Ursa, but now that Ursa knew there was more to the incident, she had a responsibility to act on it. "Isuzu, I didn't see you tugging on Ty Lee's hair. Did you do that?"

Isuzu felt tears return to her eyes, and fought them back. Azula had won. "Yes, my Lady."

"And do you think that is a proper way to punish a child?"

Isuzu felt the question spring on her like the prongs of a trap. If Ty Lee was only a servant girl, Isuzu would have said yes without hesitation. But if she said yes, she was admitting to treating a girl from the noble caste the same way she'd treat a lowly servant girl. On the other hand, if she said no, she was admitting to doing something she knew was wrong. Isuzu froze, not even sure what she believed, let alone the right answer. She wanted to kowtow and beg for mercy again, as she'd been trained to do, before she remembered Lady Ursa hated unnecessary apologies from her servants.

Ursa sighed. “It’s not a trick question, Isuzu. Put it this way: would your parents ever have punished you like that?”

Isuzu’s eyes flicked to the sides of the room as she reccollected her childhood. “Yes, they used to spank me all the time, but I usually deserved it.”

“And did they ever yank you by the hair?”

Isuzu swallowed. She hated having to discuss her low-class background in the presence of a lady, but it was a direct question and she was obligated to answer. “Yes, my Lady. Sometimes, when they were especially angry over something, they’d grab me by the hair, and strike me with a rod, or a belt…both of them did.”

Ursa’s face betrayed not a hint of the sympathy she felt. “I see. And do you think they did the right thing, or a wrong thing, by yanking your hair, before hitting you?”

Isuzu remembered her school lessons on honoring and obeying her parents, and the switchings that reinforced them. “Please, my Lady, I have no wish to speak ill of my parents. Do not ask me to dishonor them!”

“I am not asking you to speak ill of your mother and father. I am not asking you to dishonor them. I am asking you to answer a question, truthfully, about what you believe. Do you think they did the right thing, by treating you that way?”

As Isuzu thought out loud, she spoke the answer to that question, for the first time in her life. “Wel…no. That wasn’t right.”

Horrified by the answer, Isuzu clapped her hand over her mouth, before returning her hands to her knees to explain. “Of course, I don’t question the importance of discipline. It’s only that, sometimes I’d get punished for something I didn’t even do, or maybe I did do something, but…”

Realizing she was rambling again, Isuzu trailed off, not waiting to speak out of turn. She hung her head.

Seeing that Isuzu was floundering, Ursa decided to help Isuzu finish her answer. “Sometimes the punishment seemed disproportionate to your crime?”

Isuzu nodded with such enthusiasm, she momentarily forgot to add Lady Ursa’s honorific title. “Yes, exactly…my Lady.”

“In that case, would you say you did the right thing, or a wrong thing, when you spanked Ty Lee and pulled her by the hair?”

Isuzu felt the trap snap shut. It might as well have been a platypus-bear trap, and she had just sat on it. But as she had been trained to do, Isuzu answered truthfully. “No, my Lady! I mean, what I did was shameful. Please, forgive my foolishness!”

Ursa politely gestured a hand towards Ty Lee. “I am not the one you should be apologizing to.”

Isuzu spun to face Ty Lee, placing her hands on the tatami, before hesitating, wondering if Lady Ursa would censure her for kowtowing again. Ursa guessed correctly what was on Isuzu’s mind, and answered the servant girl’s question before it was even asked. “Do it properly, Isuzu, like you were taught in your training.”

Isuzu practically slapped her forehead against the tatami mat before a shocked Ty Lee. “Please forgive my arrogance and stupidity, Lady Ty Lee!”

Hiding her giggles, Ty Lee struggled to remember the proper response to a formal apology. “Oh, no biggie! …Uh, I mean, everything is fine. Pray, don’t mention it!”

Trembling, Isuzu kept her head on the mat as she awaited Lady Ursa’s sentence. It wasn’t unheard of for Prince Ozai to make a servant grovel for her job, teasing her with the hope of forgiveness, only to call for her to be taken to the whipping post at the last moment.

Ty Lee remembered to hold her hand up before speaking out of turn in the presence of a Lady of the Fire Nation court. “Um, excuse me, Lady Ursa, did I do the words right? Was that fru-fru enough?”

“Yes, Ty Lee, that was the appropriate response to a ‘fru-fru’ apology. We will still have to write a letter to your parents to explain everything that happened.”

Remembering that her parents had promised to spank her soundly if she misbehaved while visiting the royal palace, Ty Lee forgot not to speak out of turn. “Am I still in trouble?”

Isuzu was wondering the exact same thing, but her formal training kept her from saying it aloud.

Lady Ursa’s voice was calm. “Hopefully, not. I will help you write your own letter, and write a letter of my own to explain that you were improperly punished, and offer your parents my formal apology.”

Completely forgetting her courtly manners, Ty Lee pantomimed the act of spanking as she chattered freely. “But, my parents would totally spank me for breaking that vase. Probably without pulling me up by my tail like a naughty little winged-lemur, but still–”

Ty Lee stiffened. “You don’t think they’ll spank me again, do you? They always used to say, ‘A spanking at school means a spanking at home!’ This isn’t school, but it’s sort of similar, if you think about it. Though, now that I *do* think about it, I guess I *do* deserve another spanking, but

I'd prefer not to get one. I must say, I'm not particularly fond of them! Couldn't we just forgive and forget about this whole thing?"

Ursa sighed, and glanced at Azula before answering Ty Lee. Ursa had considered that possibility, but she had a sneaking suspicion word of the spanking would spread through the castle as quickly as Azula's blue flames could burn through kindling. "No, Ty Lee. Your parents deserve to know the truth. They may decide to punish you, but I won't ask them to in my letter. It's also best for Isuzu to admit what she did wrong, and ask your parents for forgiveness. Isuzu, I recall you can read and write, is that correct?"

For the first time since she had been caught, Isuzu dared to hope that she might not lose her job after all. "Yes, my Lady. Only a little from school. Crown Prince Iroh tried to teach me formal writing during his last visit, but I'm afraid I'm useless at calligraphy."

Ursa finally broke her show of stoic, formal manners, and retrieved her calligraphy tools. "I'll help you compose the letter, but it should be written in your hand, never mind your calligraphy. Azula, please sit outside while I help Ty Lee and Isuzu compose their letters. You may play in the rock garden while you wait, but don't go too far. I still need to ask you about the incident with the vase."

Azula felt a strand of her hair fall out of place, and brushed it aside."Wouldn't you like me to help you compose the letters of apology, mother? My calligraphy is perfect!"

Azula wasn't worried. After all, she wasn't responsible for the vase. But she was disappointed to see that Ty Lee and Isuzu were both apparently going to get off scot-free. Ty Lee's parents might spank their daughter on occasion, but Azula found them to be painfully overly-patient people, far too quick to forgive.

But Lady Ursa only shook her head. "There's no need. I'd prefer you take some time to clear your mind and meditate on everything that has happened today."

Ty Lee looked up from her ink stone, and struck a martial arts stance. "Ooh! Those are fire bending techniques, aren't they? You know, I'm not a fire-bender, but Crown Prince Iroh taught me that anyone can benefit from practicing the art."

Azula scoffed. "That's absurd, Ty Lee. You can't practice fire bending if you can't fire bend."

Ty Lee stabbed the air with a quick knife-hand strike, before remembering she was supposed to be writing. "Not fire bending! He called it mastering my 'chi.' I don't think I've quite got the hang of it yet."

Azula opened her mouth to argue, but a stern glance from Lady Ursa made her duty clear. Azula had been dismissed.

In the rock garden, Azula tried to practice her first fire bending form, before growing bored. She'd already mastered it. Through the paper walls on the upper floor, she could make out the shadowy shapes of the antique pottery collection.

Remembering the broken pot, Azula kicked at the rocks, disrupting the soothing pattern of lines left by the old gardener every morning. If Ursa questioned Ty Lee and Isuzu about how it broke, would she suspect anything? Azula tightened her fists, and entered her second fighting stance.

Of course, by asking to speak with Ty Lee and Isuzu alone, Ursa could question them without Azula interfering, or offering plausible answers. And if Ursa questioned her later, Azula wouldn't know what precisely was discussed. What if elements of their stories didn't line up?

Feeling her anger rise, Azula took a calming breath. The breath of fire. She felt the heat of her inner flame within, under perfect control. It would be a simple matter to torch this garden to ash, but Azula went through the motions of her second form without unleashing her fire bending. It was there, at her fingertips, always with her. Her fire bending. Her art. Her power. All under perfect control.

Of course, Azula had nothing to worry about. After all, she had done nothing wrong.

The End

[Editor's note: this time, Captain Falcon Punch graciously gave me permission to continue the story for them: our first true collaboration. In addition to my usual minor edits, I chose to rename the servant girl from "Tsuki" to "Isuzu" because I thought "Tsuki" was too close to the character Suki and might cause confusion. Special thanks to Captain Falcon Punch for writing the original story chapter and giving me permission to adapt it.]